

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

UNITED STATES MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY IN THE CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Today, the United States is confronted with a more diverse and less predictable threat than in the past. This includes both terrorists groups and states that operate outside the boundaries of international law and seek to threaten and employ force to achieve their political, territorial, and ideological objectives. Recent intelligence assessments reveal that many of these groups are investing large resources to develop and acquire long ballistic missiles that could be used to deliver nuclear, biological, and/or chemical weapons against the United States, its friends, and allies. Presently, the United States and its allies lack effective defenses against this growing threat. It is against this backdrop that the National Policy on Ballistic Missile Defense takes its shape.

This paper will discuss the adequacy of U.S. missile defense policy in the context of the contemporary strategic environment. The analysis will specifically focus on missile defense policy transformation under the Bush Administration, international and domestic political ramifications, and briefly highlight a few of the key technical challenges that affect deployment of the Administration's proposed limited missile defense capability. Finally it will provide an overall assessment regarding progress the U.S. has made in meeting the Nation's stated missile defense policy objectives.



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## UNITED STATES MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY IN THE NEW STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The gravest danger to freedom lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology--when that occurs, even weak states or small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention, and have been caught seeking these terrible weapons. They want to blackmail us, or to harm us, or to harm our friends—and we will oppose them with all our power.<sup>1</sup>

- President Bush West Point, New York June 1, 2002

For nearly fifty years the United States employed a defense strategy that largely relied on our ability to attack with a variety of options, ranging from a devastating retaliation through selective strikes and robust offensive nuclear forces. President Bush vows that these options will remain a key component of our future strategic capability and that “no group or nation should doubt that the United States will continue to depend on the certainty of a devastating response to any attack on the U.S or its allies to deter attacks by ballistic missiles or other weapons.”<sup>2</sup> In a speech to the National Defense University (NDU) on 1 May 2001, the President remarked that “deterrence can no longer be based solely on the threat of nuclear retaliation.” He called for “new concepts of deterrence that rely on both offensive and defensive forces.” According to the Administration, “these new concepts of deterrence will help underwrite a comprehensive strategy for combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile technology”.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will discuss the adequacy of U.S. missile defense policy in the context of the contemporary strategic environment. The analysis will specifically focus on missile defense policy transformation under the Bush Administration, international and domestic political ramifications, and briefly highlight a few of the key technical challenges the Department of Defense must work through to deploy an initial capability to defend the U.S. against a limited ballistic missile strike. Finally, it will provide an overall assessment regarding progress the United States has made in meeting the Nation’s stated missile defense policy objectives.

### STRATEGIC SETTING

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has changed dramatically. The focus of United States foreign and defense policy during the Cold War centered on regulating a dangerous military stand-off between two heavily armed superpowers with tens of thousands of nuclear weapons pointed at each other. Both the United States and the Soviet Union understood that



neither could provoke the other too far without triggering a nuclear attack that could literally destroy the world. This stalemate helped both sides progress slowly toward multilateral nuclear disarmament and the mutual suspicion on both sides meant that nuclear weapons technology did not proliferate outside their control. The post 1991 environment is very different. The immediate risk of a nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States has been significantly reduced. Despite the diminishing threat of an attack from Russia, our security as well as that of friends and allies in regions of vital interests continues to be threatened.<sup>4</sup> “The idea of strategic stability and the policy of mutually assured destruction (MAD) had some merit during the Cold War, when the United States, our allies, the Soviet Union, and China were still the only nations with nuclear and ballistic missile capacities. That idea and policy can no longer be relied upon, as events since the Cold War have clearly shown.”<sup>5</sup>

Today, the United States believes the greatest threat to international peace and security comes from rogue states and transnational terrorist groups that are unrestrained in their choice of weapons and undeterred by conventional means. The attacks of September 11, 2001 showed that terrorist groups were much better organized, more sophisticated, and much more capable of acting globally than many experts had assumed possible.<sup>6</sup> Many missile defense proponents believe that, if given the opportunity, rogue nations or terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda would not hesitate to acquire and use WMD against their enemies.<sup>7</sup> President Bush has made it clear that his highest priority is to protect the country against these threats. He has moved aggressively to develop a new national security strategy and new supporting strategies that are designed to make the homeland more secure and for combating weapons of mass destruction. He is firmly committed to taking every necessary measure to protect U.S. citizens from, “the catastrophic harm that may result from hostile states or terrorist groups armed with weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them.”<sup>8</sup>

Since September 11<sup>th</sup> we have learned “the world has many actors who conceivably do things civilized nations may term unthinkable, such as the destruction associated with the use of weapons of mass destruction”.<sup>9</sup> The threat posed by these weapons, particularly in the hands of terrorists or rogue states means we must adapt our security capabilities to meet the threats of today and tomorrow. Strategic clarity requires that we not be constrained by thinking developed in another time for another set of circumstances. The time has come to move beyond the framework of mutually assured destruction, and to reinforce deterrence with defensive as well as offensive measures.<sup>10</sup> Given these new realities the Bush Administration is moving swiftly to transform the Nation’s strategic posture to confront the challenges of the new strategic landscape.

## **NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE ACT OF 1999**

Missile Defense policy in the United States has been a contentious issue for over five decades. When the political balance of power shifted in the mid-1990's with the Republican takeover of the House and the Senate, the Clinton administration was forced to embrace of a national missile defense capability.<sup>11</sup> Under extreme pressure from the Republican majority, President Clinton announced, "we are committed to meeting the growing danger that outlaw nations will develop and deploy long-range missiles that could deliver weapons of mass destruction against us and our allies." <sup>12</sup> In January of the same year, Congress passed the Missile Defense Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-380) which states:

It is the policy of the United States to deploy as soon as is technologically possible an effective National Missile Defense system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack (whether accidental, unauthorized, or deliberate) with funding subject to annual authorization of appropriations and the appropriation of funds for National Missile Defense.<sup>13</sup>

The Bush Administration's current missile defense program plan is fully consistent with this policy and is moving aggressively toward the goal of deploying a limited missile defense capability before the end of 2004 or early 2005.<sup>14</sup> President Bush's unambiguous stance on missile defense leaves no doubt that in the contemporary strategic environment we must be prepared to stop rogue states and transnational terrorist groups before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends. Our strategic posture must also take full advantage of strengthened alliances, the establishment of new partnerships with former adversaries, innovation in the use of military forces, modern technologies, and development of an effective missile defense. <sup>15</sup>

## **TRANSFORMATION OF U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY**

### **THE RUMSFELD COMMISSION**

It is without question that the Bush administration's missile defense policy views are heavily influenced by the findings published in the 1998 Rumsfeld Commission report. The release of the 1995 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 95-19: *Emerging Missile Threats to North America During the Next 15 Years*, concluded that no country, other than the declared nuclear powers would develop or otherwise acquire a ballistic missile capability that could threaten the United States within the next 15 years. This conclusion ignited a fierce political debate and in 1996 Congress established the "Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States". The group was chaired by Donald Rumsfeld, who is now the

Secretary of Defense in the Bush Administration. Other notable members of the 1996 commission that now occupy high level positions on the Bush defense team include the current Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz and Dr. Stephen Cambone, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Missile Defense and Space Policy.<sup>16</sup>

In stark contrast to the NIE 95-19 assessment, the 1998 Rumsfeld Commission report concluded that proliferation of missiles was growing throughout the world, and that there could be a threat in the near term to the U.S. homeland, deployed forces, and to our friends and allies. The commission identified Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, India, and Pakistan as states demonstrating an objective to acquire ballistic missile technology. The report also noted a significant increase in ballistic missile technology traffic between the Third World and some developed countries. At the same time, our ability to provide assessments and timely warning of this now widely dispersed ballistic missile development capability was eroding and therefore the warning time we would have to respond was also eroding. The report further concluded that within about five years of deciding to do so virtually any country, with the help of freelance missile technologists could design a missile of essentially arbitrary range.<sup>17</sup>

Even though missile defense opponents continued to question the need, expense, and the feasibility of a national missile defense system, the Republican controlled Congress now had the justification it needed to pass the Missile Defense Act of 1999. The Commission's findings were further validated when North Korea launched a three stage Taepo-Dong I missile in August 1998. Even though the test failed, it confirmed North Korea's intentions to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capability. During the same timeframe, Iran conducted flight tests of the 1300 kilometer range Shahab 3 missile in July 1998 and again in July and September of 2000.<sup>18</sup>

There is little doubt that the current policy views of the former Rumsfeld Commission members now serving in the Bush Administration are shaped by these events. These examples also reinforce the Presidents belief that the United States must act now to develop the means to protect its citizens against all threats, including the possibility of nuclear terrorism from ballistic missiles.

#### NATIONAL SECURITY PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVE (NSPD) - 23

The first major step in the Bush Administration's plan to transform missile defense came with the release of NSPD-23 (National Policy on Ballistic Missile Defense). In this directive, President Bush issued guidance to the Department of Defense (DoD) to restructure the Nation's defense and deterrence capabilities to respond to emerging threats. The directive also

instructed the Secretary of Defense to examine the available technologies and basing modes for missile defenses that could protect the United States, deployed forces, and our allies and friends. The Administration's missile defense program plan builds on previous DoD work and leverages a robust body of research, development, engineering and testing that is designed to develop layered defenses capable of intercepting missiles of varying ranges in all phases of flight. The President called this effort one of the Nation's highest priorities and declared that missile defenses are an essential component of a broader effort to protect the American people. In addition, the policy also directed the Department of Defense to field a New Triad composed of long-range conventional and nuclear strike capabilities, missile defenses, and a robust industrial and research development infrastructure.<sup>19</sup>

The specific missile defense system elements the Department of Defense plans to field for operational use in 2004 and 2005 include ground based interceptors, sea-based interceptors, additional Patriot (PAC-3) units, and sensors based on land, at sea, and in space. To speed deployment of these systems to the field, the Department adopted a "spiral development" approach to permit early fielding of limited capabilities while continuing to develop and improve these systems over time. Additional elements of the system such as, the Theater High Altitude Area Defense system, Airborne Laser, and a family of boost phase and mid-course hit-to-kill interceptors are expected to be integrated into future system upgrades.<sup>20</sup> Many critics, including some in congress, believe such an approach makes it likely that unproven technologies will be fielded that will not work as intended or may require extraordinarily costly upgrades. Despite these concerns, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) has seen a steady rise in its annual budget since 2002. In fact, the MDA's fiscal year 2004 budget request of \$9.1 billion was approved by both the House and the Senate without major disagreement on either side.

In a follow-up to the release of NSPD-23, Secretary Rumsfeld issued a departmental directive that completely revamped the missions of the ballistic missile defenses of the United States. The Department made a bold decision to eliminate the artificial distinction between "national" and "theater" missile defenses by arguing that the distinction between theater and national missile defenses was largely a product of the ABM Treaty and is outmoded. For example, some of the systems being pursued, such as boost-phase defenses, are intended to be capable of intercepting missiles of all ranges, blurring the distinction between theater and national defense. In other situations, the terms "theater" and "national" are interchangeable depending on the circumstances, and are not a meaningful way of categorizing missile defenses. In another example, some of the systems being pursued by the United States to

protect deployed forces are capable of defending the entire national territory of some friends and allies, thereby meeting the definition of a “national” missile defense system.<sup>21</sup> While this directive reflects many of the innovative and intelligent changes made to our missile defense programs, its true value lies in the fact that it represents a formal order to deploy a global missile defense system capable of protecting the U.S. homeland as well as U.S. forces and allies, and friends overseas.<sup>22</sup>

## 2002 NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW

Another factor that significantly bolstered transformation of President Bush’s missile defense program was the release of the congressionally directed Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) in January 2002. The NPR examined changes in the post-Cold War security environment and identified contingencies in which nuclear forces might play a part. The effort defined the relationships among nuclear forces and other military capabilities, set objectives for nuclear and related capabilities, and outlined programs to further these ends. The review determined that, in light of favorable changes in US-Russian relations, nuclear arms could be reduced.<sup>23</sup> It also represented a dramatic shift from the previous, offensive oriented, Cold War Triad which consisted of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM’s), submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM’s), and long-range nuclear-armed bombers.

The 2002 NPR established a New Triad composed of offensive strike systems (nuclear and non-nuclear), defense (active and passive), and a revitalized infrastructure that provides new capabilities in a more timely fashion to meet emerging threats.<sup>24</sup> The combination of offensive and defensive capabilities that make up this New Triad are designed to reduce the risk to the nation as it draws down its nuclear forces while simultaneously improving its ability to deter attack in the face of proliferating WMD capabilities. Under the missile defense component of this new triad, the DoD will add new systems that are designed to deny or reduce the effectiveness of limited missile attacks.<sup>25</sup> This capability option had been previously closed due to treaty constraints and other geo-strategic obstacles.

## ABM TREATY WITHDRAWAL

Perhaps the most important aspect of the administration’s policy affecting missile defense development was the decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in December 2001. Up to this point, the ABM Treaty had been a significant impediment to the development of ballistic missile defenses. For decades the United States and Soviet Union had both deployed significant strategic nuclear forces that increasingly came to rely on long-range ballistic missiles. In an attempt to halt a further Soviet increase in the number of such systems,

the United States sought and obtained an interim agreement from the Soviet Union in 1972 for the limitation of "strategic offensive arms", which essentially froze the number of strategic ballistic missile launchers of the two sides at existing levels. At the same time, the two parties entered into a formal treaty (the ABM Treaty) on the limitation of "antiballistic missile systems," or systems designed to defend against strategic ballistic missiles. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the underpinnings of the ABM Treaty also changed. Neither the United States nor Russia felt, as they had during the Cold War, seriously threatened by the other's strategic nuclear forces. In the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) II Treaty, both the United States and Russia agreed to a radical reduction of their strategic nuclear forces.<sup>26</sup>

Eliminating this constraint gave the United States the freedom to develop, test, and deploy missile defenses in any manner it desires.<sup>27</sup> Opponents of the Administration's policies feared the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty would draw a strong reaction from Russia and possibly give them a reason to abandon the first and second START Treaties, by building up their forces and taking a harder line on other issues. The expectation was that this would lead to bitter relations between the two countries and put U.S. security at greater risk. Fortunately, this did not happen. Even though President Putin pressed President Bush to agree to modify portions of the treaty, neither side could come to acceptable terms on this issue.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, both President's committed to sharp reductions in their offensive nuclear forces.<sup>29</sup> This was a clear victory for President Bush. He had successfully achieved a key goal in re-shaping the U.S.-Russia relationship from one characterized by confrontation to one of cooperation. It also paved the way for both countries to unite their efforts in the global fight against terrorism.<sup>30</sup>

## **INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS**

### **RUSSIA**

The U.S.-Russian bi-lateral framework is the only framework in which ballistic missile defenses have been addressed in a long-term strategic construct.<sup>31</sup> It was also the only framework in which legal constraints formally existed. When President Bush made the announcement that the United States was withdrawing from the 1972 ABM Treaty he set the context by stating that "one of the signatories, the Soviet Union, no longer exists and neither does the hostility that once led both our countries to keep thousands of nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert." He went on to say that both the U.S. and Russia have developed a new, much more hopeful and constructive relationship.<sup>32</sup> Critics of the Administration's missile defense policies argued that the ABM Treaty withdrawal would have a destabilizing effect on U.S. relations with Russia and upset the balance of power. Others argued it would provoke a

strong reaction from Russia and undo all the good the ABM Treaty had provided for nearly 30 years.

In his response to Mr. Bush's remarks, Russian President Vladimir Putin noted the treaty did allow each of the parties to withdraw from it under exceptional circumstances and that the announcement did not come as a surprise. He also went on to say that "we believe this decision to be mistaken".<sup>33</sup> President Putin further made his case in a televised statement on 13 December 2001.

Russia, like the United States and unlike other nuclear powers, has long possessed an effective system to overcome anti-missile defense. So, I can say with full confidence that the decision made by the President of the United States does not pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation. At the same time our country elected not to accept the insistent proposals on the part of the U.S. to jointly withdraw from the ABM Treaty and did everything it could to preserve the Treaty. I still think that this is a correct and valid position.<sup>34</sup>

Even though Russia expressed disappointment with the U.S. withdrawal decision, its relatively passive response seemed to signal that there was, in fact, a new relationship forming between the two countries in the wake of the tragic events of 11 September 2001. Other efforts on the international diplomatic front, such as the establishment of a NATO-Russian Council (NRC) in May of 2002 to replace the NATO Permanent Joint Council (PJC), also reflect changes in the NATO-Russian relationship following 11 September. The NRC allows Russia full decision making power in a consensus driven process on a variety of issues ranging from counter-terrorism and threat assessments to arms control and non-proliferation. While many foreign policy experts saw this as a "reward" for President Putin's practical support for the U.S. led war against terrorism, others saw it a tactic to help soften Russia's resistance to NATO enlargement which now includes in its ranks former Soviet states such Poland, Lithuania, and others.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the International Institute for Strategic Studies 2003-2004 Evaluation and Forecast of World Affairs points to recent events such as "Russia's opposition to the war in Iraq, assertive policy toward former Soviet states, and increasingly authoritarian trends in domestic politics as indicators that there is still divergence between Russian and Western interests."<sup>36</sup> These assessments have prompted some to call for a reassessment of U.S policy toward Russia.<sup>37</sup>

For the time being, the Bush administration continues to view Russia as a key partner in the global war against terrorism and ties between the two countries continue to grow. The U.S. relationship with Russia involves a broad spectrum of activities which include economic, political, and military efforts.<sup>38</sup> Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to align Russia more closely with the United States, even if doing so meant abiding by U.S. policies that Moscow had

previously deemed unacceptable, has given President Bush the political leverage he needs to continue his transformational missile defense policy pursuits and silence critics both at home and abroad.

## CHINA

When China's Vice Minister Qian Qichen met with President Bush on 22 March 2001, it provided the first insights into how U.S.-China relations are likely to play out during the coming years. The fact that Chinese officials were willing to open a dialogue on the issue of National Missile Defense despite their adamant opposition to President Bush's plan to withdraw the United States from the ABM Treaty is an encouraging sign for the future stability of bilateral relations.<sup>39</sup> Shortly after the Bush-Qichen meeting, the United States suffered the terrible attacks on 11 September and China, like many other nations, also pledged its support to the United States in the war on terror. Because of its own problems with Uighur separatists in Xinjiang province, China was motivated to provide the U.S. with information on the Taliban, on whose side the Uighurs were known to be fighting. Their hope was to leverage any intelligence the U.S. could provide on the Taliban in order to combat separatists inside China.<sup>40</sup> While the U.S. has publicly welcomed this type of intelligence cooperation the Bush Administration is still concerned about other aspects of China's behavior that run counter to U.S. security concerns.

Other potential difficulties for future U.S.-China relations have been underscored by the content of three U.S. government reports. The first of these, the 2002 NPR, provided extracts of which were leaked in March 2002 that noted that China was a country that could be involved in an immediate or potential contingency, when discussing possible circumstances that may govern U.S. nuclear strike requirements. Secondly, the U.S.-China Security Review Commission submitted a report to Congress in June 2002, entitled "The National Security Implications of the Economic Relationship Between the United States and China". The report noted the close build up of Chinese forces opposite Taiwan, and estimates short range ballistic missile deployment numbers to reach 600 by 2012. Thirdly, a DoD report released in July 2002, also reported that China's military reorganization and modernization plans were moving ahead at a rapid pace and posed a potential threat to U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific Region.<sup>41</sup> As late as the Spring of 2003, proliferation issues emerged as a source of bilateral friction between the U.S. and China, which compelled the Bush administration to impose a series of sanctions against several state linked Chinese entities for their alleged involvement in the transfer of missile related and other sensitive technologies to Iran. While these actions invoked heated diplomatic protests, Beijing took immediate steps to "burnish its non-proliferation credentials". It



did so in recognition of the Bush administration's "zero tolerance" policy as a decisive factor in determining the tone and direction of America's bi-lateral relationships<sup>.42</sup>

In China, there appears to be a "wait and see" attitude toward U.S. missile defense developments. They have chosen not to react negatively to recent U.S. policy decisions but China is more prone to conflict with the United States based on strategic realities. It remains to be seen how this relationship will unfold as the U.S. moves closer to its initial deployment of defensive capabilities. The U.S. must work hard to avoid an adversarial relationship with China and instead try to build affirmative, economic, and cultural relations. The outcome of these efforts will depend largely on Chinese choices.<sup>43</sup>

#### EUROPEAN FRIENDS AND ALLIES

The National Military Strategy of the United States of America clearly ties America's goals of political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity to the task of preventing our enemies from threatening us, our allies and our friends, with weapons of mass destruction.<sup>44</sup> While some of our allies and friends, particularly in Europe are still debating the consequences of some of President Bush's missile defense policy decisions, the fact is many of our allies and friends have long been the beneficiaries of terminal phase missile defense protection provided by weapons like Patriot which is already deployed as an integral segment of the multi-layered ballistic missile defense system (BMDS). Britain's Shadow Defense Secretary, the Honorable Bernard Jenkin commented on the subject and remarked:

The logic of a global missile defense system, led by the United States and extended to Europe, means that if NATO didn't already exist it would have to be invented. The doctrine and capabilities of a global, multinational missile defense system will require precisely the same multinational underpinning as anti-submarine warfare or Western European defense required during the Cold War. At this early stage in missile defense bilateral arrangements may work best, but as it becomes essential to involve more of our allies in Europe, NATO will be the only international framework for extended missile defense.<sup>45</sup>

Thus far, the United Kingdom (UK) has put its support behind the U.S effort. In fact, the Missile Defense Agency is currently upgrading one of the ground based sensors at Fylingdales in the UK as part of the initial capability to provide mid-course sensor support to the ground based interceptors based in Alaska. In addition, the Danish parliament also approved a Bush administration request to upgrade one of its radars located in Thule, Greenland. This sensor will play a key role in the U.S. system as it evolves. Some defense experts in Europe believe that there is an urgent need for European defense policies to address the threat of rogue states,

proliferation, and the war on terrorism. The feeling is that this can only be based on a genuine unity of understanding between the United States and Europe.<sup>46</sup> For the most part, however, European political dynamics have not had any negative effects on U.S. missile defense plans.

#### **THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL DEBATE**

When President Bush assumed office in January 2001, missile defense appeared to be emerging as a politically divisive issue. Democratic leaders in the Senate hoped to reprise the Star Wars debates that had been politically profitable for them during the 1980's. Following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Democratic majority quickly dropped its efforts to cut missile defense spending and limit missile defense tests. Contrary to most predictions before 11 September 2001, Bush's decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty barely caused a ripple on Capitol Hill.<sup>47</sup> Despite these developments, opponents continue to argue that Moscow's acceptance of the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty does not mean that Russia is indifferent to the Bush administration's missile defense plans. The treaty's demise had obvious symbolic significance but no immediate practical effect. The same cannot be said about actual deployments. Experts believe that Russia will continue to evaluate how the specific technological capabilities of proposed systems affect its national interest. It is believed by some that the perspectives of those in power and the overall state of relations between the two countries at that time will inevitably shape Russia's future position.<sup>48</sup>

For the time being, however, national security and winning the war against terrorism is at the top of the list for the majority of Americans. The complexity and uncertainty of the threat environment makes predicting when or where the United States will be attacked almost impossible to determine. Given this reality, no major political battles are expected to be fought on the missile defense front anytime soon. In all likelihood, the Bush Administration will continue to have its way, with minimal resistance, as long as security remains at the top of the national agenda.

While the Bush administration seems to be well on its way to implementing the first steps in transforming the Nation's missile defenses according to its policy plans, no administration has ever had a free ride or been immune to the politics that affect missile defense policies. The uncertainty and costs of the current war in Iraq seem to rise with each passing day. It is unclear how these events will affect future missile defense plans. Even though changes in threats, technology, and fiscal resources cloud the future of this critical area, the domestic political climate clearly favors the in President's missile defense policy plans for the time being. Other factors such as, Russia's restrained reaction to the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, which

effectively derailed criticism of the decision from China and major U.S. allies, has given President Bush the political leverage he needs to continue implementation of his policy goals.

## **TECHNICAL CHALLENGES**

### **GROUND BASED MID-COURSE DEFENSE SYSTEM**

The center piece of the initial missile defense capability is the Ground-Based Mid-Course Defense (GMD) system. It is designed to use ground launched interceptors based in Alaska, an X-Band radar located on Shemya Island in Alaska, up to five other existing ballistic missile early warning radars which are currently being upgraded, and a spaced based sensor network. Additional elements are also planned for integration at a later date.<sup>49</sup>

Until now the GMD system has made five intercepts out of eight attempts under developmental test conditions. Opponents argue that these highly scripted/controlled events are unrealistic because they lack the rigor of a formal operational test. Most recently, the GMD program suffered another set back when a ground-based interceptor failed to launch during a planned developmental flight test which took place on 15 December 2004. This set back threatened to delay even further the Administration's initial plan to activate a basic missile defense capability, which had once been planned for September 2004 but now has slipped into 2005 after a series of canceled tests and developmental difficulties. Prior to the December 2004 flight test failure, the program experienced another failure in December 2002. During this test, the interceptor failed to separate from its booster and missed the target by hundreds of miles. Despite these setbacks, the President ordered the Pentagon to proceed with initial deployment of a limited system, a goal that he campaigned on in the 2004 election.<sup>50</sup>

It is true that during the course of development the GMD system has seen its share of technical challenges. To make the system work a global network of weapons, sensors, computers, command and control, and communication links must be integrated flawlessly, without delays, or glitches on a timetable dictated by the enemy. Other factors such as the radar discrimination functions and the possible use of deliberate and or incidental countermeasures present additional challenges to the system.<sup>51</sup>

In the face of these seemingly insurmountable challenges, the Administration is unwavering in its commitment to field the system and declare an operational capability as soon as possible. The Missile Defense Agency is continuing its spiral development approach which will allow the United States to declare an early operational capability as soon as the developmental system demonstrates a rudimentary capability. Given the nature of the threat, the President remains committed to the program and the Congress has seen fit to appropriate

the necessary funds to ensure the federal government can fulfill its obligation to provide the means to protect the American people from a limited missile strike.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Effective deterrence against the growing ballistic missile threat will continue to depend on the perception by potential adversaries that the United States and its allies possess the capabilities and resolve to respond to aggression. The unpredictable nature of rogue nations and transnational terrorist groups requires a fundamental realignment among the traditional elements of deterrence -- reassurance (of friends and allies), retaliation, denial and dissuasion. For the past 50 years each of these elements has supported the United States' deterrence strategy. Although the relative contribution of each element fluctuated over time as a result of evolving political, military, and technological considerations, deterrence of the Soviet threat relied principally on a ready capability to retaliate massively with nuclear forces. We believed we understood what Soviet leaders valued and we held those assets at risk. Allies and friends, in turn, understood that our defense was inseparable from theirs and believed, accordingly, that deterrence was sound. Exclusive reliance on offensive retaliation, while perhaps appropriate when our principal task was to deter Soviet expansion, is no longer appropriate.<sup>52</sup>

Detering terrorists and leaders of rogue states is much more dynamic. To counter such threats, we must seek to restructure the elements of deterrence, giving greater balance to denial and dissuasion. Such restructuring presents both challenges and opportunities. The New Triad outlined in the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review expands the range of options (offensive and defensive) now available to the United States. The addition of missile defenses provides the Nation's leadership greater flexibility in mitigating the dangers posed by ballistic missiles in the event of confrontation with adversaries.<sup>53</sup> Continued investment in the current ground-based missile defense program elements, as well as, sea and space-based components is critical to building a layered defense capability that will go a long way toward eliminating the Nation's current vulnerability to threat of a limited missile strike from a rogue state actor or a transnational terrorist group. President Bush has demonstrated exceptional skill in his dealings with Russia, China, and our friends and allies regarding U.S. missile defense policy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Missile Defense has a vital role to play in U.S defense and foreign policy. Senior members of the Bush administration, including the President himself, are strong supporters of missile defense. The administration has taken dramatic steps aimed at fielding a limited missile defense as soon as possible. The President's bold move to withdraw from the outdated ABM Treaty and

the Russian's quiet response took away the argument that the treaty was needed in order to maintain stability between Russia and the United States. The establishment of the Missile Defense Agency, continued congressional support, and concerns about the possibility of WMD falling into the hands of terrorists has given the President the necessary momentum to continue moving forward with his missile defense policy objectives.

The events of September 11 taught us that the unthinkable can happen. Whether threat is from a rogue nation or transnational terrorist group, the United States must be prepared to protect its citizens. In this regard, the President's National Policy on Ballistic Missile Defense as currently drafted takes the Nation in the right direction and will provide the necessary means to defend the country. Fielding a limited missile defense capability is the first step in improving the United States' posture to respond to the realities of the contemporary threat environment. Missile defense systems can diminish the threat of a limited missile attack against the United States by raising the costs required to make such an attack successful. By combining the planned limited missile defense capabilities with diplomacy, arms control, threat reduction assistance, export control and other elements of national power, the President will have at his disposal the necessary ways and means to ensure the Nation's stated policy goals are met.

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## ENDNOTES

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